

South Bernville Hotel
South side intersection of Bernville-Robeson Road
and Womelsdorf or Host Road
Bernville vicinity
Jefferson Township
Berks County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-257

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. PA-257

SOUTH BERNVILLE HOTEL

Location: South side of intersection of Bernville-Robesonia Road (LR06047) and Womelsdorf or Host Road (LR06020), .3 mile south of Bernville, Jefferson Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania.

USGS Bernville Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 18.405440, 4475625

Present Owner: United States Government.

Present Use: Demolished in 1977 for Blue Marsh Lake project, sponsored by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Significance: This structure is a good example of a provincial hotel built in conjunction with the Union Canal, which operated from 1828 to 1884. Built circa 1858, the hotel is composed along Italianate lines, yet it retains many traditional Pennsylvania German planning elements, including a double-door front entry system, two sets of double-decker porches on the sides of the rear projecting wing, and several sets of winding, Schnecke or snail stairways.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: circa 1858. An 1854 map of Bernville shows South Bernville relatively undeveloped. The site of the hotel is marked "Runkle Store," and this was undoubtedly the property of William Runkle from whose estate Elisas Staudt bought the property in 1858. In all probability, Elias Stoudt built the hotel soon afterwards since the building is far too big to house a simple store. The 1860 map of Bernville shows the T-shaped structure marked "Elias Staudt Hotel." The Union Canal was widened in the 1850s, and many local businessmen anticipated a great increase in canal traffic. This alone would have justified the construction of such a substantial building.

The privy seems to date from about 1900, while the storage shed may have been contemporary with the hotel, i.e. circa 1860.

2. Architect: As in the case of nearly all Pennsylvania German building, the house was not designed by an architect in the formal sense. The relative sophistication of the design and construction, however, indicates that the building was planned and executed under the direct supervision of a master builder or mason.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the hotel is located. Chain of title information for Berks County before circa 1875 is vague and often incomplete, so this data is based on educated guesses using the best available information. Reference is to the Office

of the Recorder of Deeds, Berks County, except where noted.

- 1858 Deed dated April 1, 1858 recorded August 9, 1859
in Book 68 page 448
John Runkle and John Charles Smith, Executors of
to
Elias Staudt
- 1880 Deed dated February 26, 1880 unrecorded
Amendon Bright, Administrator of the estate of
Elias Staudt
to
John Bright and Lydia, his wife
- 1880 Deed dated March 6, 1880 recorded April 7, 1911
in Book 380 page 78
John Bright and Lydia, his wife
to
Amendon Bright
- 1910 Amendon Bright died, leaving the property to
Annie A. Gruber, his daughter; deed unrecorded.
- 1912 Deed dated March 23, 1912 recorded April 29, 1919
in Book 483 page 501
Annie A. Gruber and Jacob H., her husband
to
Samuel K. Faust
- 1919 Deed dated April 1, 1919 recorded April 8, 1919
in Book 478 page 616
Thomas S. Faust, Executor of Samuel K. Faust
to
George D. Stump
- 1950 Deed dated June 22, 1950 recorded June 22, 1950
in Book 1069 page 410
George D. Stump
to
Charles Reber and Clara R. Reber, his wife
4. Alterations and Additions: The interior of the building has been altered extensively, especially about 1950 when it was converted into an apartment house. Partitions have been added and removed, and stairways blocked and re-opened so many times that it is impossible to note the individual alterations. The exterior of the building, however, seems to have survived relatively intact. A rendering reproduced in the Berks County 1876 atlas shows the building almost exactly as it was before salvaging began. The front porch, however, was re-built with brick in about 1950.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

This hotel was an integral part of the general area known as "Newport" or "South Bernville," a complex of shops, warehouses, mills, and commercial establishments located at the confluence of the Northkill creek, the Tulpehocken Creek, and the Union Canal. Maps dating from 1860 and 1876 indicated that south Bernville was a highly complex urban developmoent, requiring extensive bridging and manipulation of the land in order to accommodate the convergence of the three water systems. South Bernville was clearly the early industrial hub of Bernville; Lock #36 was located, here and the Union Canal boats stopped regularly to load and unload goods. The South Bernville Covered Bridge (1849-1938) crossed the Northkill opposite the hotel and the ill-fated South Mountain and Boston Railroad was planned to run directly to the east.

Elias Staudt seems to have been a key developer of South Bernville since both the 1865 and 1876 maps show him as the owner of several establishments in the immediate area of the hotel, including a "Grist Mill and Distillery."

C. Sources of Information

1. Old Views:

Davis, F. A. Illustrated Historical Atlas of Berks County.
Reading, Pa.: Reading Publishing House, 1876; reproduces rendering of the hotel.

DeLong, Janice C., and Pearl B. Kline. Bernville, Pennsylvania: 1851-1876. Bernville, Pa.: The Bernville Bicentennial Committee, 1976; esp. pp. 36-40; an early photograph is reporduced on p. 37.

2. Maps:

Davis, F.A. Illustrated Historical Atlas of Berks County
Reading, Pa.: Reading Publishing House, 1876.

Delong, Janice C. and Pearl B. Kline. Bernville Pa.: The Bernville Bicentennial Committe, 1976. 1854 map reproduced on p. 38; 1860 map on p. 39; 1876 map on p. 40.

Township Map of Berks County Pennsylvania "from actual Surveys by L. Fagan". Philadelphia, Pa.: H.F. Bridgens, 1862.

3. Secondary Sources:

Meiser, George, IX. "Historical Survey of Blue Marsh Project Area." Historical Review of Berks County XXXVI (Summer, 1971), 98-110; see esp. p 102.

Prepared by Thomas Kheel
Project Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
August, 1976

PART I. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This building is a good example of a mid nineteenth-century, Pennsylvania German hotel. It is constructed of brick with Itaianate details; yet it retains many traditional planning elements, including a double-door entry system, two sets of double-decker porches on the sides of the rear projecting wing, porches on the sides of the rear projecting wing, and several sets of winding, Schnecke (snail) stairways.
2. Condition of fabric: Very poor; the building has been salvaged in anticipation of demolition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The T-shaped building measures approximately 37' across its five-bay front by 36' deep, with the rear wing measuring approximately 25'-6" long by 32'. The main block is three full stories, while the rear wing is two-and-a-half stories.
2. Foundations: The foundation is randomly laid limestone masonry.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: The outside walls are red brick painted white (now faded and peeling). The outside of the foundation walls are plastered and painted white.
4. Structural system: The structural system is brik bearing walls with heavy, sawn wood joists supporting the floors.

5. Porches: There is a 7' deep porch running across the entire front of the building protecting the two front doors. The porch foundation and balustrading is made of red brick with concrete caps of a recent vintage. The porch roof is held up by three tapering wooden box columns forming two long structural bays. The floor of the porch is narrow-width, tongue and groove boards.

There are two sets of double-decker porches built into the sides of the rear wing. These porches are about 25' long and 6' deep. Each porch is composed of two wooden columns forming two bays.

There are steel lally columns reinforcing the porches at several points. The floors of the lower porches are concrete, while the floors of the upper porches are narrow-width tongue and groove boards.

There is a cantilevered wood hood over the entry door on the north side of the main block, measuring about 4' by 6'.

6. Chimneys: There are three brick chimneys in the house: one in the center of each side wall of the main block and one in the middle of the end wall of the rear wing. All three were used to vent iron heating stoves. The chimney on the north wall of the main block leads to a small fireplace, while the chimney in the end wall of the rear wing begins on a wood platform in the attic.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The two front doors are made of wood panels with a large single light in the top half. They are painted green and white, and are fitted with two-light transoms. The side doors to the building are similarly constructed, except they are fitted with three-light transoms.
 - b. Windows and shutters: All the windows in the building have been removed, but they were six-over-six-light, double hung sash. Most of the shutters have also been removed, but they were made of wood with two panels and fitted with traditional clasping hardware.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof on the main block is a hip roof covered with tin sheets painted dull green. The roof over the rear wing is a gable roof covered with tin sheets painted dull green placed over wood shingles (the bottoms of which are visible from the attic).
- b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice is wood and is supported by turned wood brackets.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The first floor of the main block is divided in two parts with the north part being two bays wide and the south part three bays wide, each accessible by its own front door. The north half is one large room which can be subdivided by two large doors. This space was probably the original bar room. The south half is divided into three rooms of approximately equal size. The rear wing is divided into two rooms.
 - b. Second floor: A hallway running the length of the structure provides access to four rooms on the north side and three rooms on the south side. These rooms were originally used as hotel rooms, and were later converted to apartments.
 - c. Third floor: Two staircases in the main block of the house provide access to what may have been as many as five rooms (the partitions and flooring have been removed). A small door leads to an unfinished attic in the wing.
2. Stairways: The main stairway, located in the rear of the main block and accessible from both the north and south parts, was boarded up when the hotel was converted to apartments. It was a straight-run stairway, as is the stairway located between the first and second rooms in the south half. In the rear wing, winding stairways are located in the southeast and southwest corners. There is also an exterior stairway connecting the first and second levels of the porch on the north side of the wing.

The second and third floors are connected by one straight-run and one winding stairway. The basement and the first floor are connected by a winding stairway and an exterior straight-run stairway, located on the west wall of the rear wing.

3. Flooring: All the floors are covered with pine boards, measuring 3" to 4" wide. Linoleum has been placed over the wood in many rooms.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All the rooms were plastered over wooden lath. Some are painted light pastel colors and some are covered with floral wallpaper. Several rooms on the first floor have a wainscoting.
5. Doorways and doors: All the doors have been removed, but most were of wood panel design and construction.
6. Decorative features and trim: All the rooms are fitted with simple wood baseboards painted various colors. The window surrounds and closet woodwork are similarly treated.
7. Hardware: All the hardware has been removed, but most of it was metal with porcelain doorknobs.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Lighting: Many of the rooms are fitted with early versions of modern electrical fixtures. They are mounted in the center of the ceiling in each room. Some of the electrical switches are the early push-button type.
 - b. Heating: Heating was by iron stoves venting into the chimneys. There is a brick arched support in the northwest corner of the cellar of the rear wing which once supported a fireplace above.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces east (towards the Bernville-Robeson Road) and is sited on flat ground. Although the roads in the area have been changed numerous times, the building was always located closed to the road.

2. Landscape design: The generous planting of Norway maples, Colorado blue spruce, lilacs, and a Japanese maple suggests a well thought-out planting scheme. Concrete walks appear in many places, facilitating circulation to and from the building. A well lies just north of the main block of the building.
3. Outbuildings:
 - a. Privy: This frame structure lies about 30' directly behind the rear wing of the building. It is a four-seat privy with partitions built between each hole. It was used by the guests of the hotel and may have also been used by the apartment dwellers. The building measures about 8' by 10' and has a gable roof covered with mineral-surface asphalt singles. The building is frame construction and is sheathed with vertical boards which have weathered gray.
 - b. Storage shed: This one-and-a-half-story frame structure lies about 15' northwest of the rear wing. The east half of the first floor has a finished floor and served as a work space. A doorway leads from this room into the west half of the building which is open to the roof. There is a set of wood stairs providing access to a storage platform over the east half of the structure. The building has a gabled roof covered with tin sheets painted a dull green. The walls are covered with wide horizontal boards which have weathered gray. The building is heavy frame construction and has a brick chimney in the north end wall mounted on a wood platform built into the wall. There is an ornamental barge board running along the roof line on all four sides of the building.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Tulpehocken Creek Survey was undertaken in 1976 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) in cooperation with the Philadelphia office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the construction of Blue Marsh Lake. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, the documentation was prepared on site by project supervisor Perry Benson (University of Pennsylvania); student architects Robert E. Clarke (University of Notre Dame), Gregory Lee Miller (University of Illinois), Robert Moje (University of Virginia), Daniel F. Clancy (University of Pennsylvania), and Steven M. Shapiro (University of Maryland); and HABS project historian Thomas H. Kheel (Cornell University) and HAER project historian Stuart Campbell (University of Delaware). The drawings were completed in the HABS office in 1977 and 1978 by Mr. Clarke and HABS architects Susan M. Dornbusch and Bethanie C. Grashof. The HABS data was edited for transmittal in 1980 by Alison K. Hoagland of the HABS staff.